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ABSTRACT

Describing a game-playing concept called "Tangoes" which is also known as the ancient Chinese puzzle game of Tanagram, this paper offers a teaching method which enables students to better understand the roles played in groups as well as how groups function. The paper contains a list of materials, an explanation of the process, usage variations, and a brief discussion on how to use the game. (CR)

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"Teaching Group Roles With Tangoes"

Great Ideas For Teaching Speech

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Introduction:

In the constant quest for creative ideas and intriguing ways to demonstrate the concepts discussed or needed for class, I came across a game-playing concept that enables my students to better understand the roles we play in groups as well as how groups function. As a major proponent for "hands on learning," I utilize this exercise in my Hybrid Basic Course. Obviously, it could be applied to interpersonal, small group, teams , business and professional, nonverbal and public speaking areas. In order to convey this pedagogical approach, I will provide the materials needed, the process, possible variations and a few final notes.

The Materials:

Tangoes (sometimes called Tanagram) is an ancient Chinese puzzle game that can be purchased for $11.00 at any gaming store or, learning center or at Brookstone stores. The game consists of two sets of plastic geometric shapes (Seven shapes for each set.) and a deck of 34 cards. Each card has a geometrical pattern on it that can be built by the use of the seven pieces. On the back of each card is the solution --just in case!

The Process:

After the class lecture and discussion on the roles played in groups, wherein I describe Task, Functional and Self-serving roles and all the participants therein, I choose 10-14 students and place them in two groups. I ask them to place their chairs in a circle and have a central work area. (desk top, floor, etc.) The remainder of the class acts as observers. I then explain the rules of the game. First, the students in the circle must choose two to three group norms that their group will follow in the process of this game. They may select any rules they wish. For example sometimes, a group will say, "You can't talk unless you raise your hand." or "Everyone has to be polite." Once the norms are chosen and stated out loud for the observers to hear, the game can begin. In fifteen minutes the group must complete the puzzle of my choice. (I don't pick easy ones!) The observers will look for the roles that we have discussed in class and evaluate/critique on a form I have created. (attached) After 15 minutes, one group may have finished the other may have difficulty, but time is called. If the other team has not solved the puzzle, I let them look at the solution and then they try to complete it. Each group of observers are given time to report what they examined. If we have time, I switch the teams around and allow the observers to play the game as well.

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The variations:

There are numerous possibilities of usage for this game! You can have them do the exercise and not allow them to talk to each other, etc. I have also utilized this assignment when discussing nonverbal, conflict and teamwork lectures. It is also a handy tool for demonstrating leadership and analyzing the different types of leaders. When using this as a focus, I choose a leader and a style and the students role-play from that point of view. I usually choose a student that has exhibited an opposing leadership style. For instance, a student that shows an authoritarian leadership style may be asked to take on a *laissez faire* approach. The method used depends on the style used. (i.e. one person giving orders or someone just sitting back and letting the group solve the problem.)

Discussion:

The students really enjoy this exercise and it efficiently explains the concepts of group roles. There is usually extensive commentary during the exercise--sometimes inflammatory and ribald, other times, they take the assignment very seriously. The observation is the truly reflective and most crucial aspect of the assignment. We get to talk about the group process, how they interact, what they would change(usually the norms) and general observations. Students who are good at spatial puzzles can excel at this exercise, but most students are stumped.

Although this is not a new concept, Tangoes provides an easy method of teaching and because of all of the possibilities of shapes and patterns, you can use the assignment over and over in many topic areas. Tangoes is now providing two new sets of refills--more cards to create more shapes. The feedback from my students is excellent and I get to be creative and let the students take responsibility for their learning.

Tangoes Evaluation Form

1. What norms did the group choose?____ _____

_____

2. The group exhibited which of the following rules?
Task Functional Self-Serving

3. Circle the roles* that were exhibited:

Task:
information giver opinion giver information seeker

information seeker information giver expediter

idea person analyzer

Maintenance:
active listener game leader harmonizer

gatekeeper compromiser front person

Self-Serving:

aggressor blocker competer

withdrawer special pleader joker

monopolizer

3. Comments overheard: _____

_____

_____

4. Rate this group's effectiveness:

very effective somewhat effective not effective at all

5. What is one aspect that makes the group effective or non-effective? _____

_____

*Based on Communication by (Barker and Gaut 1996) All textbooks provide different names for these roles.